

May 20, 1982

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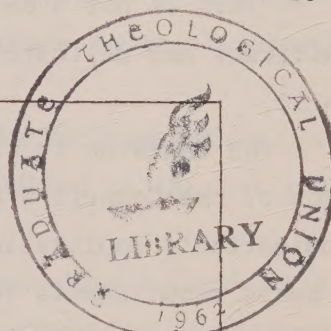
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MEMBERSHIP BID AND PEACE WITH JUSTICE NCC FOCUS

DPS 82183

NASHVILLE (DPS, May 20) -- A decision to defer for one year a potentially divisive vote on the membership application of a predominately homosexual denomination highlighted the three-day meeting of the Governing Board of the National Council of Churches that concluded here on May 14.

The board also took significant action to shape the work of the Council over the next three years around the theme of pursuing peace with justice. It adopted a "1982-1984 Triennial Framework" that established priorities for the Council's programs. In other business, the Council addressed the Middle East and current government proposals to return organized group prayer to the public schools and to establish tuition tax credits for parents whose children attend non-public schools.

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The Episcopal Church is one of 32 Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox communion -- with membership numbering nearly 40 million people -- who belong to the National Council of Churches. The 260-member Governing Board meets semi-annually to enact the policy that guides the Council's work.

The Governing Board voted to defer until May 1983 any action on the membership application of the Metropolitan Community Churches, a denomination formed in 1968 with a special ministry to homosexual people. Between now and next May, the issues "about the nature of the church and human sexuality" raised by the application will be studied by the Council's Commission on Faith and Order, the unit that deals primarily with theological issues. The commission was instructed to involve the member churches and the Metropolitan Community Churches in the discussion.

"This is not a delaying action but a responsible attempt to approach a very significant and delicate subject," said Bishop James Armstrong, president of the Council.

The decision to study the issue was made instead of accepting the recommendation of the Council's Constituent Membership Committee which had reviewed the denomination's application. It had decided that the Metropolitan Community Churches met basic requirements for membership in the Council, such as number of members, kind of organization, ecumenical spirit and action as outlined, in the constitution. It had recommended that the the Governing Board declare the Metropolitan Community Churches "eligible to be considered for membership."

The proposal to delay action for a year in order to study the issues was made by Dr. Paul Crow of Indianapolis, ecumenical officer of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). "This is an event of agony for all of us," Crow said. "This application is a unique application because it raises substantial questions about the essence of the NCCC....This Governing Board needs time and resources to explore this matter and to discern the views of the constituents."

During the 45 minutes of restrained but intense discussion that followed Crow's proposal, one significant issue raised was whether it is appropriate for the Council members to pass judgment on the theology of other Christians. Several speakers pointed out that serious differences in theology exist among the present members of the Council but that the communions continue to be in fellowship with each other.

On at least one other occasion, according to several speakers, the Council has given serious consideration to the theology of a denomination before admitting it to membership.

For other members of the Governing Board, justice, not theology, was the main stumbling block in accepting Crow's proposal. The Rev. Percel Alston, a black representative of the United Church of Christ, said, "I have the strange feeling that I've met this motion before. The issue then was not homosexuality but race. (Crow's) motion would have the effect of amending the constitution....For us to change the rules now seems to me to be unfair."

The possible effects of rejecting Crow's proposal and accepting the recommendation of the Constituent Membership Committee concerned other speakers. A vote to consider the denomination eligible for membership, some said, would be interpreted by the people in the member communions as the decisive vote, not as one part of the process, and could cause serious divisions in the ecumenical agency.

But some members of the board seemed to share the opinion of the Constituent Membership Committee that the Metropolitan Community Churches meets the eligibility guidelines of the National Council.

"The issue today is whether this church is eligible for membership," said Barbara James, an Episcopalian, from Des Moines, Iowa. "Based on the rules we're currently working under, that cannot be denied."

Not everyone agreed. The next speaker, Andrew Vance of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, said, "There is a question of whether the Metropolitan Community Churches 'exists as a Christian body.' That is a theological issue."

Following the meeting, Council President Armstrong said, "I don't think the theology of the church is the issue. It's the lifestyle implicit that troubles some -- many -- of the communions that would affect the unity of the churches in the NCCC."

Although many of the member communions support civil rights for homosexuals, none affirms homosexuality as a Christian lifestyle and many consider it sin and its practice contrary to the will of God.

Crow's proposal, a substitute for the main motion, was approved by a slim margin: 88 voted in favor, 77 opposed and there was one abstention. When it was subsequently adopted by the board as the main action of the membership application, only a handful of people voted against it.

The 15-member Episcopal Church delegation, headed by Presiding Bishop John M. Allin, had differences of opinion about this issue. Since votes are not recorded, it is not known how the individual delegates voted.

Application for membership in the National Council involves several steps. If the Metropolitan Community Churches is declared eligible for consideration for membership at the May 1983 meeting, it would still face two votes at the November 1983 meeting in order to become a member. It would have to be approved by two-thirds of the communions present and voting, and by two-thirds of the individual delegates present and voting.

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In establishing its priorities for the coming three-year period, the Council's board approved an overarching emphasis on "pursuing peace with justice" under which all Council program will be carried out. "This will be the urgent conceptual theme of the triennium," the board declared, "which will infuse and integrate our Council's tasks.

"The next three years ... will continue to test our unity and our courage," the board said. "Resources ... are devoted to military ends, while the poor cry out for work and shelter, bread and ballots We feel a special responsibility to start with our own nation," the board said, "in creating a world at peace and a world where justice prevails."

All of the Council's work during the next three years will be done "under the canopy of 'pursuing peace with justice,'" and will fall into seven main "arenas of concern": peacemaking and survival, human rights, economic justice, ethics of technological innovation, individuals and families in human community, personal wholeness and spiritual renewal, and unity of the church and strengthened congregation.

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In line with its Middle East policy, the board expressed gratitude for recent efforts made by both Israel and Egypt in approaching peace in the Middle East, but restated its conviction that resolution of the Palestinian problem in all its aspects is central to the peace process.

Toward that end, the board reiterated its long-standing call for dialogue between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization and urged the U.S. government to formulate a more active approach to Middle East peacemaking. Such an approach promote mutual recognition "between Israel and the representatives of the Palestinian people." The U.S. government was asked, as it has been since 1974, to open dialogue with the Palestine Liberation Organization as "one means of moving toward this goal." The board also expressed deep concern for resolving the conflict in Lebanon, particularly in light of increasing tensions between Israel and the Palestinians in southern Lebanon.

On matters related to education, the board reaffirmed its opposition to any possible reinstatement of group prayer in public schools. In 1963, the board had said, "Neither the church nor the state should use the public school to compel acceptance of any creed or conformity to any specific religious practice." The board supported the Supreme Court language describing the First Amendment "as providing no role for government in prescribing or providing for prayer in public schools."

The board also reaffirmed "its opposition to the granting of tuition tax credits to parents who choose to send their children to non-public schools," because the Council supports "the public school system as an indispensable means of providing educational opportunity for all children" and believes "federal financing of private and parochial schools by tax subsidies would drastically endanger public education."

In other actions, the board:

- Urged that the Falkland/Malvinas Islands dispute be settled by negotiation rather than by armed force, and joined with Christians in the islands, Great Britain, and Argentina in "prayer for reconciliation";
- Commended three statements on baptism, eucharist, and ministry of the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order to the member communions for study;
- Called for clemency for three black South African political dissidents who have been sentenced to death for their political beliefs;
- Urged the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate the alleged harassment of black elected officials, especially the case of Mayor Eddie Carthan of Tchula, Miss.;
- Registered a protest with the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service for its treatment of Susane Berkerley, a Roman Catholic social worker from Grenada who was denied entrance to Puerto Rico for a theological conference;
- Reaffirmed opposition to segregation or discrimination based on race, and called on member communions to study the issues of racial justice and religious liberty as they relate to the Goldsboro Christian School and Bob Jones University;
- Opposed the mass exclusion or deportation of undocumented persons from the United States without due process of law.

Episcopal Church delegates present, in addition to Allin, were Bishop Gerald McAllister of Oklahoma; the Rev. William B. Lawson of Lynn, Mass.; the Very Rev. Elton O. Smith of Buffalo, N.Y., who is recording secretary of the Governing Board; John L. Carson III of Denver; Mrs. Barbara James of Des Moines, Iowa; the Rev. F. Goldthwaite Sherrill of Brooklyn, N.Y., Mrs. Constance Lyle of Tacoma, Wash.;

Eric Scharf of Washington; the Rev. William A. Norgren, Ecumenical Officer at the Episcopal Church Center, New York; and Mrs. Alice P. Emery, Executive for National Mission at the Church Center.

Absent members were Bishop David B. Reed of Kentucky; the Rev. William James Walker of St. Louis; Dr. Willard Dav of Reno, Nev., and Barbara Quinn, Personnel Officer at the Church Center. Substituting were Bishop William H. Clark of Delaware; the Rev. Dr. William L. Weiler of Washington; and Bishop Milton L. Wood, Executive for Administration at the Episcopal Church Center, New York.

The next meeting of the board will be Nov. 5-7 in New York City.

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MORTON ELECTED
BISHOP IN SAN DIEGO

DPS 82134

SAN DIEGO (DPS, May 20) -- The bishop-elect of the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego is the Very Rev. C. Brinkley Morton, rector and dean of the Cathedral Church of the Advent, Birmingham, Ala.

Elected on the 23rd ballot of a special convention, at St. Paul's Church here, Morton has indicated his acceptance of the election provided he receives the required consents of the Episcopal Church's standing committees and bishops.

His election came on May 15, three weeks after the convention reached a stalemate on April 24 following 20 ballots. To be elected, a candidate must poll a majority of the votes in both the lay and the clergy orders, with the two groups voting separately.

Morton was one of the five candidates presented to the convention on April 24 by a nominating committee. Three persons were nominated from the floor. Three of the eight nominees withdrew during the balloting on April 24.

One of the remaining candidates, Bishop Donald J. Davis of Northwestern Pennsylvania, who came within one vote of election in both orders when the convention was recessed after the 20th ballot, withdrew before the beginning of voting on the 21st ballot on May 15.

In addition to Morton, the May 15 candidates in the voting included the Rev. James E. Carroll, San Diego; the Rev. Canon Richard B. Harms, San Diego; and the Rev. Benjamin V. Lavey, La Jolla, with Carroll finishing second behind Morton.

Morton, 56, is a native of Meridian, Miss. He received his L.L.B. and his J.D. degrees from the University of Mississippi, and his M. Div. degree from the University of the South, Sewanee, Tenn.

Before studying for holy orders, Morton was a practicing attorney and has served as a member of both the Mississippi House of Representatives and the State Senate. Since his ordination to the priesthood in 1959, he has served congregations in West Point and Okolona, Miss., and Memphis, Tenn.

He and his wife, Virginia Roseborough Morton, have two children.

When he is consecrated next fall, he will succeed the Rt. Rev. Robert M. Wolterstorff, the diocese's first bishop, who is retiring at the age of 68.

The Diocese of San Diego, which was formed by General Convention in 1973 from the southern counties of the Diocese of Los Angeles, has 20,000 baptized members, 16,000 communicants, 92 clergy, and 44 parishes and missions.

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CHURCHES' EXHIBIT
OPENS AT FAIR

DPS 82135

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (DPS, May 20) -- It was a bright day in May when the 1982 World's Fair was opened here by fanfare, ruffles and flourishes, ambassadors, senators and congressmen, businessmen and dignitaries, men, women and children, actors and even a speech by the President of the United States.

One of the exhibits is "The Power," in which sixteen churches united to present an historic witness to their faith. Roman Catholics joined with Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, Lutherans, Baptists, and Pentecostals to make a statement of the Gospel.

"Using the most advanced, modern technology available, visitors to the exhibit of the churches enter into a space vehicle and travel back to the beginning of time, where they find that God created the heaven and the earth," said Theodore Baehr, president of the Episcopal Radio-Television Foundation and executive producer of "The Power." "Then they travel to paradise where they turn away from God, and are kicked out into a room which represents our search for a means to overcome our alienation through power, energy, politics, sex, war, and do-it-yourself religions. Finally, in the midst of the chaos, Jesus appears and leads the audience through the cross into his body. Here they are filled with his power and joined together to sing the Lord's Prayer, and then go out into the world to worship and serve God."

Peter Wolf, designer of Broadway classic stage sets such as "My Fair Lady," "The King and I," and "Peter Pan," is the designer. Irwin Yeaworth, president of Valley Forge Films, is the director. Todd Coleman, award winning New York filmmaker, is the assistant producer.

Participating denominations include the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the Church of the Brethren, the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.), the Church of God (Mountain Assembly), the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the Episcopal Church, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, the Lutheran Church in America, the National Baptist Church, the Presbyterian Church in the United States, the Roman Catholic Church, the United Methodist Church, and the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

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Picture Caption

#82135 The Church's presence at the 1982 World's Fair in Knoxville, Tenn., is an exhibit called "The Power," which is sponsored by 16 churches, including the Episcopal Church. At left is Theodore Baehr, executive producer of the exhibit, who is also president of the Episcopal Radio-Television Foundation. At right is Harold Bales, executive director of the Church's presence at the fair.

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VICTIMS OF FLOODS,
POLIO, CYCLONES AIDED

DPS 82136

NEW YORK (DPS, May 20) -- Floods in Texas, cyclones in Madagascar, polio outbreak in the Dominican Republic. These are the crises to which the Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief has responded with recent emergency grants.

Madagascar has experienced exceptionally high amounts of rainfall in the past few months, intensified by a series of devastating cyclones -- Benedicte, Electre, Frida, Gabrielle, and Justine by name. Almost incessant rain has fallen since Justine struck and the already saturated, level ground cannot provide adequate drainage.

Justine, which struck on March 18, brought high winds as well as heavy rain which caused heavy damage to the area, which is the main vanilla-growing district. Almost 100 persons have lost their lives, 9,000 houses have been destroyed and 118,000 persons have been left permanently without shelter. The value of the damage has been assessed by the government as about US \$250 million.

The Presiding Bishop's Fund made a grant of \$5,000 to assist the victims who have suffered displacement in Madagascar.

The Fund approved a special grant of \$4,000 in response to an appeal by Bishop Telesforo Isaac of the Episcopal Diocese of the Dominican Republic because of an outbreak of polio in that country.

The Fund purchased 15,000 doses of vaccine in Italy at a cost of \$4,000. Church World Service, the relief office of the National Council of Churches, worked with the Fund in providing an additional 15,000 doses. The vaccine was sent from Italy to the Dominican Republic by air in early May.

Severe flooding in Wichita Falls, Tex., prompted Bishop A. Donald Davies of the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas to request an emergency grant of \$5,000 from the Fund. The Fund responded with a grant in that amount in mid-May to help with emergency relief for the victims. Davies reported that hundreds of families were made homeless and other property damage was extensive.

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